



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER PLEADS GUILTY TO SEXUALLY ABUSING A MINOR WHILE SERVING IN COSTA RICA

SAN JOSE – A Santa Cruz man pleaded guilty today to sexually abusing a minor in Costa Rica while serving there as a Peace Corps volunteer. This prosecution is the result of a two-year investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Peace Corps Office of the Inspector General, and the Diplomatic Security Service of the United States Department of State.

Timothy Ronald Obert, 38, admitted that in September of 2001, he traveled to Costa Rica to work as a volunteer for the Peace Corps, where he was assigned to work with “PANI,” Costa Rica’s child welfare agency. Obert admitted that in July 2003, while he was in Costa Rica, he engaged in illicit sexual conduct with a 14-year-old Costa Rican minor at his apartment.

“This defendant committed a serious sexual assault while serving as a Peace Corp volunteer in a program dedicated to helping the underprivileged,” said U.S. Attorney Kevin V. Ryan. “Because the PATRIOT Act expanded our jurisdiction to include U.S. missions abroad, this defendant could not evade justice.”

The investigation began after a fellow Peace Corps volunteer who was staying at Obert’s apartment reported seeing a naked minor emerging from Obert’s bedroom in the early morning hours of July 6, 2003. The incident was reported to the Associate Director of the Peace Corps in Costa Rica, who ultimately terminated Obert from the Peace Corps.

“Some people mistakenly believe they can escape detection and prosecution by committing child sex crimes overseas,” said Charles DeMore, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in San Francisco. “This case shows the lengths to which ICE will go to use its powerful authorities to protect children worldwide.”

“The Peace Corps has a zero tolerance policy for misconduct that violates the law or standards of conduct established by the Peace Corps,” said Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez. “The prosecution of former Peace Corps volunteer Timothy Obert is evidence of this fact.”

This case is the first prosecution of a Peace Corps volunteer for sexually assaulting a minor while serving in the Peace Corps in a foreign country. In addition, this case is one of the first prosecutions involving a statute enacted under the PATRIOT Act, which expanded the special and maritime jurisdiction of the United States to encompass residences in foreign countries that were being used by U.S. personnel on U.S. missions.

In pleading guilty, Obert admitted that the Peace Corp, which is an independent federal agency of the United States government, is a mission of the United States government. He also admitted that he was a personnel assigned to a United States mission during his stay in Costa Rica from in or about September of 2001 through on or about July 15, 2003, when he terminated early from the Peace Corps and returned to the United States.

Obert's sentencing is scheduled for May 15, 2006, before Judge Whyte in San Jose. The maximum statutory penalty for sexually abusing a minor within the special and maritime jurisdiction of the United States is 15 years and a \$250,000 fine. He will also be required to register as a sex offender.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.